



Transparency

Thoughtful Approach Needed to Benefit Consumers

The Iowa Osteopathic Medical Association supports the goal of empowering patients to make informed decisions regarding their healthcare, especially as it relates to cost and quality of care. In order to ensure that the information is useful to patients, a thoughtful approach is necessary. This is not an issue that can be solved overnight. Recognizing the challenges to a transparent system is the first important step that must be taken.

- **Organizing Cost Data:** While it may on the surface seem that cost data is readily available. The truth is, it is not. Currently cost data is collected by medical practices, hospitals and payors in the form of procedure codes reported when a patient receives a health-care service. This data is reported along with a code identifying the illness or injury which necessitated the service. The difficulty comes in aggregating this cost data for the treatment of an entire episode of care not just a single encounter.

Real-Life Example: A simple example may help to illustrate this point. A patient presents with a complaint of a sore throat, is examined, and given a diagnosis of viral pharyngitis for which the code is 462.0. Two days later the patient continues to have symptoms and returns to the clinic where they are now diagnosed with strep throat for which the code is 034.0. Are these two separate illnesses or one illness that progressed and should be seen as a single episode of care? Some would argue that they are in fact the same illness and should be counted as a single episode of care thereby aggregating the costs. Others would argue that the viral infection made the patient susceptible to strep infection and they are in fact two separate illnesses and therefore the costs should not be aggregated.

- **Collecting Quality Data:** No similar mechanism currently exists for collecting quality data. The most effective way to collect quality data at the clinical level is through the use of electronic medical records (EMRs). In a recent report, the Iowa Health Information Technology Initiative indicated that only twenty five percent of Iowa physicians' offices use electronic medical record. In June the Iowa Hospital Association reported that only ten of Iowa's 121 hospitals had fully implemented EMRs. Efforts to expand the use of EMRs must be allowed to be implemented before information relating to quality care can be efficiently collected.
- **Consumer-Friendly System:** The final challenge is presenting data in a format that is understandable and useable by the consumer. Other states that have implemented similar programs have been unable to overcome this hurdle and have seen minimal use of their databases. If we are to invest the cost of creating such a program, we must make sure that the data is useable by consumers.

IOMA shares the goal of empowering patients to make informed decisions regarding their healthcare. The State of Iowa should be a leader and seek to create a system that works for consumers through careful planning and study. IOMA stands ready to assist the Iowa Legislature in finding ways to meet this laudable goal without adding significant costs or burdens to the healthcare system.